

Foreword

Faith-based and community organizations across the United States historically have provided a wide range of social services to persons from all walks of life. They have, for example, helped people who are homeless, conducted supervised recreational activities after school for youth, provided quality day care for young children, and offered support and services to people with mental illnesses. Lives are enhanced by these interactions.

In 2001 President George W. Bush established the Faith-Based and Community Initiative to promote full participation of faith-based and community organizations in the provision of social services. The initiative focuses on elimination of obstacles to organizations' working with the Federal government in funding and operating those services.

In recent years, a number of mental health consumers have informed the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), part of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, that faith and spirituality are critical in their paths to recovery. Some consumers have asserted that their relationships with faith communities have enhanced their lives; others have claimed that certain attitudes and practices have impeded their recovery.

To explore the roles of faith and community organizations in recovery for people with mental disorders, CMHS sponsored a dialogue between mental health consumers and members of the faith community. Two dozen participants

- ♦ Identified characteristics and issues related to interactions between mental health consumers and members of faith-based and community organizations; and
- ♦ Formulated recommendations for achieving better mutual understanding and creating partnerships to promote recovery among persons with mental illnesses.

Their findings and recommendations are summarized in this monograph.

This dialogue was the fifth in a series of dialogues sponsored by SAMHSA's CMHS. Beginning in 1997, mental health consumers have met with groups of formal mental health providers—psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatric-mental health nurses—to open lines of communication.

SAMHSA welcomes comments and suggestions from consumers, their families, and members of faith-based and community organizations about this monograph and its use. We hope it helps build bridges that support the recovery of persons with mental illnesses.